

# Finding a Place to Live



**Prepared by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of Corrections**

This Housing Brochure is designed to assist you in developing a home plan. The information and questions provide a thoughtful guide to finding a place to live that will be helpful to your successful return to the community. Space is provided for you to make personal notes, list resources and/or to write down questions that you may want to ask your counselor or your Parole agent.

In addition there are sections of this brochure that will be useful once you are out in the community and looking for a place to live, should you not have a residence to return to upon your release.

Whether you are returning to your former neighborhood or to an area that is not familiar to you, the information and questions provided will help you to think about what options are available to you. It will help you think about what important steps you need to take now and will need to take later in preparation for your return to the community.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOC #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this survey is to find out what you already know about developing a housing plan and arranging for housing when you leave the State Correctional Institution or the Community Corrections facility. This will help us to provide you with the guidance and information you need to make a successful transition.

1. Have you discussed a home plan with your corrections counselor?  
Yes \_\_, No \_\_
2. Have you discussed a home plan with your parole officer?  
Yes \_\_, No \_\_
3. Do you have a home plan that has been approved? Yes \_\_, No \_\_  
—
4. If you have an approved or a possible home plan, please describe your home plan. (Will you live alone, with a family member, where, etc.)
5. When do you expect to leave this facility? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you need help in understanding how to rent an apartment or house?  
Yes \_\_, No \_\_
7. Have you rented before? Yes \_\_, No \_\_.  
If "yes", what was your experience?
8. Have you ever owned a home? Yes \_\_, No \_\_
9. Have you ever been evicted? Yes \_\_, No \_\_
10. Is there any help or information about housing that you need?
11. What restrictions, if any, has your parole officer made as to where you can live (limits on your Conditions of Parole, physical, etc.)?

DEVELOPING YOUR HOME PLAN

The first step in planning where you will live when you return to the community is to develop a home plan that will be acceptable to your parole agent. In deciding what is a suitable home plan, your parole agent or parole investigator will obtain from you or others the following information and any other necessary information regarding your proposed living arrangement when you leave the State Correctional Institution or the Community Corrections facility:

- Name and relationship (if any) of the person offering the house or apartment.
- Location, including directions to the residence and a description of the neighborhood.
- Name and phone number of a home plan investigator regarding this living arrangement.
- How close is your residence to your job and public transportation?
- Sleeping arrangements.
- List of others living at this location, their relationship to you, their ages, sources of income, criminal records and feelings about you (especially about your offense).
- Potential areas of conflict between you and the others living at this location.
- Are there any weapons present in the home?
- Availability of a telephone.
- Has there been any history of domestic violence at this residence?
- Confirm that the person offering the home is aware of your criminal history.

Your parole agent will emphasize your responsibilities regarding paying your rent on time, how you plan to handle meals, your employment arrangements and following the rules. The home plan investigating parole agent will provide you with the following information:

- Agent's role, responsibilities and contact information.
- Your parole conditions and their impact on those residing in the home.
- Moving and travel restrictions.
- The no weapons policy (no weapons are allowed in the home).
- The agent's ability to conduct searches and make unannounced visits.

**DEVELOP YOUR HOME PLAN**

Completing the following exercise will help you prepare an acceptable home plan.

- Identify the person and relationship (if any) of the person offering the house or apartment.
- Describe the location, including a description of the neighborhood.
- List the names and phone numbers of anyone interviewed regarding this living arrangement.
- How close is this property to your job and public transportation?
- What are the sleeping arrangements?
- List of others living at this location, their relationship to you, their ages, sources of income, criminal records and feelings about you, (especially about your offense).
- Explain any potential areas of conflict between you and the others living at this location.
- Determine whether there are any weapons present in the home.
- Is a telephone available for your use and for your parole agent to reach you?
- Has there has been any history of domestic violence at this residence?
- Have you told the person offering the home your criminal history?

**CHOOSING A PLACE TO LIVE**

When choosing your housing, you will probably rent at first. When renting, there are lots of things to think about. These decisions are important ones, so you should take the time and effort to make choices. In this unit, you

will learn about how to look for a place to live and how to rent an apartment.

### **Some important things to think about:**

- a. Where to look?
- b. How much can I afford?
- c. Type of place (home, apartment, room, mobile home, etc.)
- d. Size
- e. Location
- f. Transportation needs
- g. Furnished or Unfurnished?
- h. Utilities (heat, air conditioning, electricity, water)
- i. Safety
- j. Noise
- k. Parking
- l. Recreational activities
- m. Pets allowed?
- n. Roommates



### **How much can you afford to pay for rent?**

Today, the general rule is that no more than one fourth of your income should be spent on rent and utilities. So, if you earn \$1,500.00 per month, one fourth of that would be \$375.00. Therefore, unless you have someone helping you pay the bills, you should not spend more than \$375.00 per month on housing costs. This is a major reason to consider sharing the apartment with a friend. Sometimes, landlords will adjust the rent if a tenant is willing to help improve the property, by painting or doing repairs. If you have the interest and skills, don't hesitate to ask about this possibility.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

There are many decisions to be made in choosing housing. However, cost is often the deciding factor. Basically, you should rent only what you can afford.

Here are some decisions you will need to make.

### **Location**

Where do you want to live? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Cost**

How much can you afford to pay for housing? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Type of Place**

What type of housing do you want to rent? (Size and kind of housing unit)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you want it to be furnished or unfurnished? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Transportation**

What transportation is available (particularly to your job)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Utilities**

What utilities will you need to pay for?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Environmental Concerns**

What are your concerns about noise, safety, cleanliness, etc.?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Parking**

What are your parking needs and what is available?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Recreational Activities**

What interests do you have in recreational and leisure activities?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **SOURCES**

When looking for housing, there are various sources you may use. Some of the most common are: newspaper ads, friends, signs in windows, bulletin boards

(often found in grocery and mini-mart stores), telephone book Yellow Pages, rental agencies, and real estate offices.

### **Using the Newspaper**

1. Find the Classified Ad section of your local paper. The Sunday edition is generally the most complete. (Check index for Classified Ads)
2. Turn to the Rental Section. Decide if you want to rent a room, an apartment, a condo, or a house.
2. Locate three ads that interest you.
3. Using the three want ads you chose, complete the information sheet on the next page. If the information is not given in the ad, write in N/A (for "Not Available").
4. Once you have completed the form from the information provided by the ad, think about what questions are important to you that were left unanswered.
5. If you have a relative or friend who may assist you in finding a place to live prior to your release, you may want to send this information sheet to him or her. **He/She** may be able to contact the numbers listed and request further information and an application form for you.

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Ad #1 Phone Number:</b>	<b>Ad #2 Phone Number:</b>	<b>Ad #3 Phone Number:</b>
How much is the rent?			
Are any utilities included?			
Is it furnished?			
How big is it?			
What kind of unit is it?			
Where is it located?			
Is there an application fee?			
Are there laundry facilities?			
a. Are pets allowed?	a.	a.	a.
b. Do you plan to have a pet?	b.	b.	b.
a. Do you have to pay a security deposit?	a.	a.	a.
b. How much?	b.	b.	b.
a. Is a lease required?	a.	a.	a.
b. How long?	b.	b.	b.
a. Is rental insurance required?			
Is there access to public transportation?			

### **RENTING A ROOM**

The amount of money you have determines what you can rent. Many people renting for the first time choose to rent a room, which is cheaper and still allows you to live on your own.



1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Find the Classified Ad section of your local newspaper.
2. Turn to the rental section and location "Rooms for Rent".
3. Choose three ads that interested you. Record the phone numbers in the spaces provided.

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>#1</b>	<b>#2</b>	<b>#3</b>
With whom did you talk?			
How much is the rent?			
What furnishings are included?			
Are meals included?			
Can you use the kitchen?			
Can you cook in your room?			
Do you have access to a refrigerator?			
Is there a private bath?			
Is there access to a telephone?			
Are there laundry facilities?			
Is a deposit required?			
Is it on a bus line or is other public transportation available?			
How many other people live there?			

## **CHECKING IT OUT**

Once you have chosen a few places that are of interest to you, and gotten basic information, you are ready to look at them. To do this, you would call contact persons and make appointments.

Before you go to look at a place, you should be prepared to check the following:

### Location

- Is it near stores, banks, etc.?
- Is it safe?
- Is it on a bus line?
- Is it noisy? (traffic, dogs, neighbors, children)



### Outside

- Is there parking?
- Is it well lighted?
- Is there a security system?
- Does it look well maintained?

### Inside

- Do you smell odors?
- Is there a garbage disposal?
- Is it carpeted?
- What appliances are included?
- Are curtains included?
- What utilities are included?

Heat  Electric  Gas  Cable TV  Water

- Are there enough electrical outlets?
- Is it clean and well maintained?
- Can the doors and windows be locked?
- Is there enough water pressure?
- Check the bathroom

Ventilation  Bathtub or Shower  Clean



- Is there adequate storage space?
- Are there any signs of bugs, etc.?
- Are there laundry facilities?

## **LOOKING CLOSER AT THE OTHER COSTS**

Once you have looked at places to live, you may think you're ready to make your decision and move in, but there are still other costs that you should consider. If you are lucky, you have found a place that has some or all of the utilities included. However, there will still be other costs you will have to pay. Identify the costs of utilities by using the following guide. You may ask for copies of receipts.

### Telephone

Number to call: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of deposit required:



\_\_\_\_\_

Installation fee:

\_\_\_\_\_

Basic monthly rate:

\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL costs to install phone:

\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL monthly bill (without long distance calls, they are extra): \_\_\_\_\_

### Electric Company

Number to call: \_\_\_\_\_



Amount of deposit:

\_\_\_\_\_

Connection charge:

\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL:

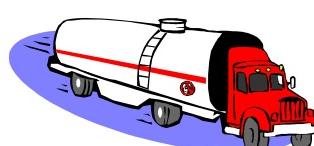
\_\_\_\_\_

Average anticipated monthly bill:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Gas or Oil Company

Number to call: \_\_\_\_\_



Amount of deposit:

\_\_\_\_\_

Connection charge:

\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL:

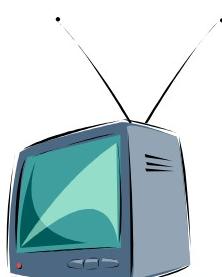
\_\_\_\_\_

Average anticipated monthly bill:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Cable TV

Number to call: \_\_\_\_\_



Amount of deposit:

\_\_\_\_\_

Connection charge:

\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL:

\_\_\_\_\_

Average monthly bill:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Internet Service

Number to call: \_\_\_\_\_

Basic or average monthly bill:

\_\_\_\_\_

Additional telephone connection charges: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, add up all the deposits and other costs you will have to pay to move in:

Housing deposit \_\_\_\_\_

First month's rent \_\_\_\_\_

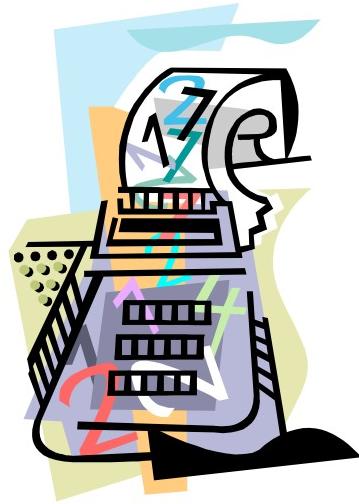
Telephone deposit and  
installation fee \_\_\_\_\_

Electric deposit and  
connection charge \_\_\_\_\_

Gas or Oil deposit and  
connection charge \_\_\_\_\_

Cable TV deposit and  
connection charge \_\_\_\_\_

Internet service charge  
(if any) \_\_\_\_\_



TOTAL move-in expenses: \_\_\_\_\_

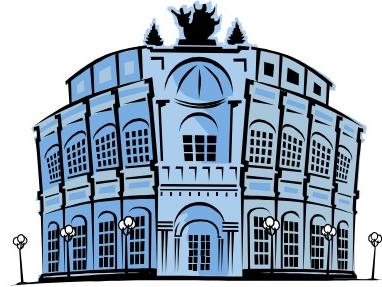
## **SHARING SPACE AND THE RENT**

Now that you know what it will cost for you to move in, you may want to think about having a roommate. However, although it will save you money to have someone share the apartment or house, there are other things to think about.

Choosing a roommate may not be as easy as you think. Your friend may be a great person to spend time with, but you may find that you would not like living with him or her. It's especially important that the person you plan to share space with will be responsible in paying his or her share of the expenses – and will not engage in behavior that will create problems for you (such as doing drugs or other illegal activity). Remember – your parole agent will visit periodically.

What kind of person are you? Circle the answer that best describes you.

1. Neat or sloppy?
2. Smoke or dislike smoking?
3. On-time or tend to be late?
4. Like loud music or quieter music?
5. Prefer television, radio or CD's?
6. Save money or spend money easily?
7. Borrow from others or don't like to borrow?
8. Spend free time alone, with a few people, or like to be around a lot of people?
9. Can say "no" to friends or have trouble saying "no"?



Taking into consideration what you are like, describe the kind of person with whom you would be willing to share an apartment or house.

---

---

---

---

---

## **MOVING IN**

Once you have found a place where you want to live and have signed the rental agreement or lease, you are ready to move in. You can rent a truck if necessary. But most people depend on friends to help them move. So, ask a few friends to help, schedule a convenient date, bring some food and music, and have fun. Afterwards, you can relax in your new home. And, be willing to return the favor.



Be careful of your back!



Get rid of the dirt first.



Add your personal touch.

Once you have moved into your new place of residence, make it a routine to clean.

- ◆ Wash dishes as you use them or wash them all at the end of the day.
- ◆ Pick up after yourself. Put dirty clothes in a hamper or designated area and put clean clothes in your drawers or closets.
- ◆ Sweep floors often; vacuum carpets and mop floors once a week.
- ◆ If you share your new residence with others, make a work chart and share the chores.

## **SETTING YOUR GOAL AND ACHIEVING IT**

As you search for housing or even after you have found it, you will need to do many things to accomplish your goal. You will have to identify the steps or objectives to reach it.

Listed below is a five-step way to set a goal and meet it.

1. Set a specific goal.
2. Plan steps to meet your goal.
3. Identify any barriers.
4. Decide how to overcome them.
5. Measure your progress.

Listed below are four topics for goal setting in the area of housing. Choose one topic and set a goal for yourself. Remember to set a specific goal that you can measure and follow the five-step process above. Use the bottom half of this page to develop your plan.

1. Renting a room or apartment.
2. Contacting a landlord.
3. Choosing a roommate.
4. Locating an apartment to rent.
5. Your own topic \_\_\_\_\_.



---

---

---

---

---

**This process can be frustrating.  
Don't give up!  
Ask for help.**



**MORE  
TO  
THINK  
ABOUT!!**



Before you sign a lease, you should think about all of the things you will need to furnish your place and to set-up housekeeping. Considering the deposits and fees, list some ways that you can get furnishings inexpensively. Consider shopping at retail stores operated by Goodwill Industries, the Salvation Army and Volunteers of America or other thrift shops. In the space below, make a list of all the things you will need, where you can get them reasonably, and approximately how much they will cost.

**THINGS I NEED**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**WHERE TO GET THEM**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**COST**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

When you rent housing, you may have to sign a lease, which is a legal contract. Your lease will tell you:

1. The period of time you agree to live there.
2. How much rent you will pay each month.
3. If there is a security deposit, if it will be returned, and under what conditions.

If you break the lease, you may still have to pay the landlord until someone else is found to rent your space. If you do not have a lease, you can move out at anytime. The landlord can ask you to move out on short notice or raise the rent at anytime. When you sign a lease, you are agreeing to everything in it, so **READ IT CAREFULLY, ASK QUESTIONS, and DISCUSS** it with someone else before you sign it.

Here is an example of the first part of a lease. You should look at the details very carefully.

AGREEMENT OF LEASE, made as of May 10, 2003, between *Jane Brown* (hereinafter called "landlord"), and *Joe Smith*, whose address is 749 Elm Avenue, Somewhere, Pennsylvania, ..... (hereinafter called "Tenant").

WITNESSETH: Landlord hereby leases to Tenant and Tenant hereby hires from Landlord the apartment 104D on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor in the building known as 120 Oak Street (hereinafter called the "building", ..... for a term of one (1) year (or until such term shall sooner expire or terminate as hereinafter provided), to commence on *June 1, 2003*, and to end at noon on *May 31, 2004*, both dates inclusive (such term being hereinafter called the "term"), at an annual rate rental of

Three hundred eighty Dollars (\$380.00) to be paid in advance *on the first day of each calendar month* during the Term which Tenant covenants and agrees to pay in lawful money of the United States which shall be legal tender in payment of all debts and dues, public and private, at the time of payment.

Finding appropriate housing is a key component to your success in reestablishing yourself in the community. As you can see there are many things you need to consider as you plan for your release. Talk to your counselor, parole agent, friends or sponsor if or when you begin to feel overwhelmed with the task at hand.

If you find that you are unable to make a rent or house payment or if you become evicted from your place of residence, contact your parole agent and explain what happened and the circumstances that led up to that event. If you have any doubts or questions about what you need to do to correct the situation or to get assistance, contact your parole agent.

Space is provided below for notes, questions or to list resources. It is hoped that you will use the contents of the brochure to assist and guide you to a new home and a fresh start.

